

Lectio Divina – Fourth Sunday of Advent Year C

Contexts

Luke's Gospel (in brief)

- Composed between 80-90 CE
- Part of a 2 volume work (together with The Acts of the Apostles).
- 2nd Century tradition names the work for Luke and claims he was the same person as the companion of Paul. However, there are significant differences between Paul's writing and what appears in Luke about Paul's writing which seems to suggest that the author of Luke was not the Luke referred to in Paul's letters.
- Author is clearly an educated man and a city-dweller, not a country-sider.
- Sources include Mark's Gospel and the Q source and a good deal of other material.
- From Mark: the narrative detail about Jesus' life
- From Q, the 'sayings' (teachings) of Jesus.
- Don't really know where the other material comes from, e.g. the infancy & childhood narratives.
- Work is addressed to "Theophilus" which means, "Lover of God" – this could be a specific individual, or simply every Christian.
- An ordered account of life of Jesus and apostles

Luke 1:39-44 – things to notice

- The Gospel is part of the story which began with the Annunciation of the Angel to Mary. Having been told by the angel of Elizabeth's pregnancy Mary rushes to her side. Today's Gospel tells the story of their meeting. Mary's reply to the words of Elizabeth in the Magnificat is omitted from this reading.
- Mary sets out with a sense of urgency. The journey is long, maybe about 140kms. The hill country of Judah is to the eastern side of Jerusalem. Whatever the historical truth about the story (only Luke tells it), the story portrays a Mary, prompted by concern for Elizabeth urgently responding to Elizabeth's need in spite of a difficult and long (costly) journey.
- Mary arrives and greets Elizabeth – probably the usual simple greeting of Shalom – Peace!
- The action of John the Baptist (leaping) and the Spirit-filled prophetic words of his mother, draw attention to the fact that Mary has in fact brought Peace Itself with her.
- Elizabeth's prophetic intuition enables her to recognise Mary as the 'mother of my Lord'.
- Elizabeth recognises the 'blessedness' of both Mary and of the One she carries.
- She wonders why she has been chosen to receive the honour of this visit.
- She remarks that even the child in her womb recognises (witnesses to) the presence of the Messiah.
- Elizabeth praises Mary's faith that the promise of the Lord would be fulfilled in her.

The Liturgical Context & Reflection – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

The great Christmas feast is almost here. As always in Advent, what is promised in the first reading is brought to fulfilment in the Gospel reading. We began Advent with the cry, 'Come, Lord Jesus'. We will end it with the joyful shout, 'God is with us!'

Beautiful words from the Prophet Micah form the first reading today which looks forward to the birth of a leader for Israel who, as a shepherd king gathers the people and feeds them with the power of the Lord and the majesty of God. His powerful reign will bring about an era of security and he himself will be peace.

So often in the Sunday readings, the words of the first reading become fulfilled in actions, events and people in the Gospel.

What Micah looks forward to in words becomes flesh and blood in the person of Jesus. Luke's touching story of the meeting of the pregnant cousins, Mary and Elizabeth, is full of joy, warmth and love.

It's not hard to imagine the joyful greetings and embrace at Mary's surprise visit. Mary greets Elizabeth with the usual greeting, Shalom ('Peace!') which is exactly what she brings with her - the One Micah talks about in the first reading, the Messiah.

In his very first act of witness to the presence of the Messiah, John leaps in his mother's womb which releases within her the power of prophecy. Filled with the Holy Spirit Elizabeth proclaims Mary as blessed, wonders at why she, herself, should have been found worthy to give hospitality to the mother of the Lord, and blesses Mary's faith that the promises of the Lord would indeed find fulfilment in her.

Can we dare to imagine that we, too, carry within us the Peace of God? Can we welcome the presence of God within us and one another? Can we find the ways to nourish our awareness of that presence, let it grow stronger and deeper until our whole life is filled with God, immersed in God and overflows in every word, thought and action of ours?